



Edzi Agnyatsvet
Mikola Arochka
Anatol Astreika
Mikola Auramchik
Alyes Bachila
Maksim Bagdanovich
Rygor Baradulin
Danuta Bichel-Zagnetava
Pyatrus Brouka
Kanstantsia Builo
Genadz Buraukin
Anton Byalevich
Wladzimir Dubouka
Syargei Dzyargai
Stsyapan Gaurusyou
Nil Gilevich
Pyatro Glebka
Anatol Grachanikau
Syargei Grakhouski
Yolga Ipatava
Mikhas Kalachinski

Fair Land of Byelorussia

Ivan Kalyosnik
Wladzimir Karatkevich
Mikola Khvedarovich
Kastus Kireyenka
Yakub Kolas
Kandrat Krapiva
Arkadz Kulyashou
Yanka Kupala
Mikola Kusyankou
Aleg Loika
Yeudakia Los
Maksim Luzhanin
Pyatrus Makal
Arkadz Martynovich
Nina Matsyash
Pimen Panchanka
Wladzimir Paulau
Alyaksei Pysin
Pilip Pyastrak
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Anatol Serbantovich
Yanka Sipakou
Mikola Surnachou
Yuras Svirka
Maksim Tank
Raman Tarmola
Valyantsin Taulai
Kastus Tsvirka
Vasil Vitka
Anatol Vyalyugin
Anatol Vyartsinski
Yaugenia Yanishchits
Alyaksei Zarytski
Khvyodar Zhichka
Vasil Zuyonak

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Fair Land of Byelorussia



An Anthology of Modern
Byelorussian Poetry

Translated by
WALTER MAY

Translated from the Byelorussian
Designed by L. GRITCHIN

Editorial Board: MAKSIM TANK, MIKOLA AURAM-
CHIK, ANATOL VYARTSINSKI (compiler), PIMEN
PANCHANKA, IOSIF SEMEZHON, LYUDMILA
SEROSTANOVA

МОЯ ПРЕКРАСНАЯ БЕЛОРУССИЯ
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ПОЭЗИИ

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5 CONTENTS

A Gift to the People and All Humanity. <i>By Maksim Tank</i>	13
EDZI AGNYATSVET	20
My Wish	21
"Belarus" Tractor in India	21
The "Appassionata"	23
The Law of Attraction	24
Misha Kaminski	24
MIKOLA AROCHKA	27
"Somewhere on the river Nile's green delta..."	28
Elk Calf	28
"At candour..."	29
ANATOL ASTREIKA	30
Blessing	31
My Tent	31
Autumn Goes	32
MIKOLA AURAMCHIK	34
"The thrown wide open windows..."	35
Pigeons	35
Byelorussian Pine	37
Meeting of Old Ponymen	37
"Here they are, the wide and free expanses..."	39
ALYES BACHILA	41
"You, just like poetry..."	42
"When, if but once, with praise like thunder..."	42
To a Girl	43
"And when the last sharp volleys of the war..."	43
"You beg me read..."	44
"No! That was no kind of dream, it's clear..."	45
MAKSIM BAGDANOVICH	46
"One cold dark night upon the field's expanses..."	47
"Warm the eve, and calm the breeze..."	47
Sonnet	47
"The gleaming candle shines and strives..."	48
Romance	48
In My Dreams	49
Fulfilled Promise	50
Borders	50
"I should like to meet you outside..."	52

6 CONTENTS

"In the dark of night the rushlight's flickering..."	52
"When Vassily fell in war..."	53
Levonikha	53
RYGOR BARADULIN	55
The Cradle	56
The Stork	57
The Stones of Brest Fortress	58
Eternity	59
"The peace so long awaited..."	59
DANUTA BICHEL-ZAGNETAVA	61
"If the truth, though a bitter potion..."	62
"From where do you come with such eyes then?..."	62
Potters	63
"In summer I find town killing..."	64
"My cheek to your lips press nearer..."	65
"Around us, as earlier..."	65
PYATRUS BROUKA	67
Hope, little Hopeful	68
Dawn Choir	69
Autumn Goes	70
Skylark	71
The Beginning	72
The Book of Spring	73
The Roads to the Front	74
"Should my friends wish to know it..."	75
KANSTANTSIA BUILO	78
I Love Our Land	79
The Storm	80
"See how the little star of Venus shines..."	81
"Like a little green leaf from the tree..."	82
GENADZ BURAUKEIN	83
Poem of Parting	84
ANTON BYALEVICH	91
The Death of Malanya	92
The Cooper	94
WLADZIMIR DUBOUKA	96
"When your lips softly whispered, 'No, no!'"	97
"Lead on, my heart..."	97
Heather	99
Sunrise Over the Pripet	99
"Where are my horses, my horses of black..."	101
"I have known happiness, sorrow I've known..."	102

7 CONTENTS

SYARGEI DZYARGAI	103
Hiroshima	104
A Fairy Tale	105
The Genuine Thing	106
I Hear Your Eyes	107
STSYAPAN GAURUSYOU	108
Bread and Salt of Hospitality	109
Circus Horses	110
"Through evening's garden, garden rosy-dappled..."	111
"Was it the snow-man you were seeking..."	111
Summer Heat	112
NIL GILEVICH	114
"Wonders happen — I awake..."	115
"Do not forsake me now, my yearning sweet..."	115
"My forest blue, my native forest green..."	116
"In that small village, where I've never been..."	116
Night	116
"The birches freeze in the forest..."	117
December Scene	119
"Far off afield in Varna's foothill area..."	119
PYATRO GLEBKA	121
Of What Do the Nightingales Sing?	122
Homeland Bread	123
Lights	124
ANATOL GRACHANIKAU	127
White Russia	128
In Polesye	128
"Upon dawn's writing paper, yellowish-blue..."	129
Twilight	130
The Day Grew Ripe	130
It Is Still Not Yet Night	131
Fairy Tales	132
SYARGEI GRAKHOUSKI	133
"For every invalid my soul is aching..."	134
The Oak Leaf	134
Aching Heart	135
"We grew up chewing bread and chaff alone..."	135
Sweetbriar	135
"It grows dark in autumn quickly..."	136
VOLGA IPATAVA	138
Lilith	139

8 CONTENTS

"You think that sleepless nights are still my part?..."	140
To My Son	140
MIKHAS KALACHINSKI	142
Lake Naroch	143
Recollections	143
IVAN KALYOSNIK	145
Strawberries	146
Memories	147
WLADZIMIR KARATKEVICH	148
The Hare Is Brewing Beer	149
Earthquake	149
Byelorussian Song	151
Sunrise	153
MIKOLA KHVEDAROVICH	154
All of Which We Are Dreaming	155
Lovage	156
KASTUS KIREYENKA	157
The Morning Goes Forth!	158
After the Storm	158
The Thyme's Wild Scent	159
"The darkness fell..."	161
YAKUB KOLAS	162
Do Not Beg, and Don't Expect	164
To Byelorussians	164
Our Folk Will Win	165
Harvest	165
"Take Your Place at the Back!"	166
Brewing Storm	168
"The people all groan from the weight of the sword..."	168
To My People	169
The Voice of the Land	170
A Genius Lives Among Us	171
KANDRAT KRAPIVA	172
Grandad and Baba	173
Close Relations	174
Fritz's Trophy	175
ARKADZ KULYASHOU	177
The Ballad of the Four Hostages	178
To Poetry	180
"I would bury my love..."	180
At Half a Milliard Kilometres	182
Elegy	182

9 CONTENTS

"There is for every poet his plot to harrow..."	183
"We've broken all the laws of gravitation..."	184
"No, I shall never snatch the stars from heaven..."	184
"Not just one month I perish from inaction..."	185
"I owe my mother all — my name at table..."	186
YANKA KUPALA	187
A Peasant	189
What I Saw	190
But Who Marches There?	191
"I'm not for you, my lords, oh no!..."	191
Clouds and Thoughts	193
Fading...	193
To My Girl	194
Betrothal	194
Out Now!	195
For All	196
To Byelorussian Partisans	197
MIKOLA KUSYANKOU	200
"A forest lake. A lovely day awaking..."	201
Our Line	201
Oil!	202
ALEG LOIKA	204
"No sooner had the old well-handle creaked..."	205
"So dear to me this endless great community..."	205
"And fate prepared me too for war..."	206
"But I am dozing still and dream..."	207
YEUDAKIA LOS	208
Mother	209
Our Forefathers	210
"Come, welcome guest..."	210
"In our small town..."	212
MAKSIM LUZHANIN	214
Immortality	215
A Moravian Song	216
Rat-a-Tat!	217
I Just Thought...	218
Oaks	219
The Artist	219
I've Met Them All...	220
PYATRUS MAKAL	222
"It seems the wounds have got better..."	223
"The rocket and the automobile..."	223

10 CONTENTS

To Work, Then, Graver of Light	224
I'm From the Farm	225
Rat-Race	226
ARKADZ MARTYNOVICH	227
A Riddle	228
"Above the green grove, but not high..."	229
NINA MATSYASH	230
"I thought that it was spring alone I loved..."	231
"How long it is the storks have not appeared..."	231
There Lived Once on a Time a River	232
PIMEN PANCHANKA	234
"Grey clouds swept o'er the forest speedily..."	235
The Flame Everlasting	236
Loneliness	237
Heart and Cross	238
WLADZIMIR PAULAU	240
Work	241
"If there rose from each company one man..."	242
Light and Shade	242
ALYAKSEI PYSIN	244
"A thread without a tangle..."	245
"Through my window fifteen stars are sporting..."	245
"Towards day's end the light still lingers..."	246
"In the oak grove the nightingale's silent..."	247
"Much in this life soon passes by..."	247
"Whitening, apple-trees, whitening..."	248
"Suppose you make, just for your soul's own sake..."	249
PILIP PYASTRAK	250
Mausoleum	251
Père-Lachaise Cemetery	251
About Khatyn	252
ALYES RAZANAU	254
Speech	255
Unuttered Ballad	255
The Ballad of the Omen	256
The Drummer	258
MIKHAS RUDKOUSKI	259
Polesye Legend	260
My Grandad Was a Village Smith	261
ALYAKSEI RUSETSKI	263
Powder Barrel	264
Revelation	265

11 CONTENTS

April	266
Skylark	267
Zone of Silence	267
RYGOR SEMASHKEVICH	269
Dreams in Technicolour	270
"Ah, the wings of your white arms!.."	271
ANATOL SERBANTOVICH	273
"It's a sight I can't stand..."	274
"On that serene and cloudless early morning..."	274
YANKA SIPAKOU	276
Realm of Mosquitoes	277
"The autumn trees look like an X-ray taken..."	278
Kastus Kalinovski's Noose	278
"Forest groves are bustling with one agitation..."	280
"I love the village in spring..."	281
MIKOLA SURNACHOU	282
In the Trampled Rye	283
Meditation	283
"You stand beside the smouldering ruin..."	284
YURAS SVIRKA	285
Do Not Fade	286
Ballad About a Memorial	287
First Post-War Years	287
MAKSIM TANK	289
At Once When They Told Me	291
"Why plait your hair..."	291
Ave Maria	292
"Of course, it's all the axe's fault alone..."	293
Happiness	294
My Daily Bread	294
Tract on Poetry	295
Pines Above Lake Naroch	299
Let There Be Light	300
RAMAN TARMOLA	302
Ballad of Bomb Fragments and the Early Morning Dew	303
My Wood	304
Grain	305
VALYANTSIN TAULAI	307
My Last Word	308
Stone Upon Stone	309
Verses From Lukishki Gaol	309
Comrade of My Spring	310

12 CONTENTS

My Verses	311
May Day Banners	313
To Tutors	314
KASTUS TSVIRKA	315
Black Earth	316
Grouse Language	316
"Far beyond the hay-heaps drying..."	317
Partisan Song	318
VASIL VITKA	320
Nicolo Paganini	321
Immortality	321
Hardening	322
The Bayonet and the Rose	323
My Dad	324
Rye	326
ANATOL VYALYUGIN	327
Ballad of the Urals Tank	328
ANATOL VYARTSINSKI	331
Lenin's Laughter	332
Requiem for Every Fourth	333
A Man Is a Crank	336
The Sea, the Sun, I and Our Lovely One...	337
YAUGENIA YANISHCHITS	339
"Seek me out, send me the call!"	340
Our Neighbour Pelagea	340
"When fire directed at the bird..."	341
ALYAKSEI ZARYTSKI	342
The Girl and the Smith	343
"I was in the fire..."	344
What's To Be Done?	344
Concerning Wine	345
If I Only Knew	346
KHVVODAR ZHICHKA	347
"But what will the neighbours say?"	348
"Here runs the pattern..."	348
VASIL ZUYONAK	350
Memorial	351
"Arise, dead tyrants and oppressors..."	351
"The sound recedes, but melody will stay..."	352
A Word From the Translator	354
Alphabetical Index of Titles and First Lines	

A GIFT TO THE PEOPLE AND ALL HUMANITY

A Word with the Reader

Esteemed reader beyond our borders! You are about to make the acquaintance of Byelorussian poetry, and I should like to preface what will, I hope, be an interesting and instructive meeting with a few words about my country and her poetry.

They say that in order to understand a poet, one must visit him in his country. But it is also true to say that in order to get an idea of a poet's native country, one must get to know his poetry. A poet's heart belongs, first of all, to his native parts, his motherland, and to her he dedicates his most sacred and noblest songs. Poetry and love for one's own land are inseparable. I have been convinced of that by my own personal experience.

I had on many occasions to travel not only around our unencompassable country, but also on numerous delegations to many corners of Europe, Asia and America. I brought back from my travels the firm conviction that on this earth grow not only trees, grass and flowers, but poems too. They grow everywhere. I found them on all the highways and byways, on all continents, and brought them home with me. But all the same, the brightest and most beautiful I found in my native land. That is only natural, for here are my sources, and here are my roots.

Making your acquaintance with our poetry, dear reader, you will not be able to help feeling its blood-ties with our people, our country, and our natural heritage.

In it, particularly in the works of its progenitors, Yanka Kupala, Yakub Kolas and Maksim Bogdanovich you'll hear the voice of social protest, of summons to the struggle for a better life, for the right "to be called humans". That is the voice of the Byelorussian people, whose historical path was extremely difficult, and at times one of great torment. Her people fought against their enemies, internal and external, and alongside them battled their poets and their bards. It is no coincidence that Yanka Kupala's first printed work dates from 1905, the year of the first Russian revolution. It is also no coincidence that precisely with that memorable piece a new Byelorussian poetry begins. "A new period in the history of Byelorussian literature," wrote M. Bogdanovich, "has its starting point in 1905, marking a decisive turning point in the psychology of the mass of the people. From that very time Byelorussian literature

brings its gifts not only to its own people, but to all humanity."

In our poetry, esteemed reader, you will meet the word "revolution", and will catch the bright-sounding chords of praise in honour of October. That is the voice of the people, the song of their souls, for the Great October Revolution put an end to the national and social oppression of the Byelorussians, and opened up to them a wide road to a new and happy life. The second birth of Byelorussian literature, and its free and unhindered development are directly connected with that great event.

In our poetry you will hear praise of the new life, the happiness of inspired and creative labour on behalf of man. That is the voice of the people, the song of a land changed beyond all recognition.

If you also hear, as truly you undoubtedly will, the anxious echoes of war, its never-to-be-forgotten memories, here white with anger, there black with despair, you must understand that Byelorussian soil was more than once ploughed up by the storms of war, that it is sorrowfully sown with the communal graves of our people's best sons and daughters, who gave their lives for the freedom and independence of their land.

In the struggle with the German fascist invaders over 2,230,000 Byelorussians perished—every fourth inhabitant of our land. That is the reason why in the verses of our poets inevitably rings the mournful bell of Khatyn—the name of a small forest settlement, burned together with all its inhabitants by the hitlerite punitive squads. That same fate overtook scores of other Byelorussian villages. That is why so many Byelorussian poetic works sound like a requiem for every fourth, and as a curse upon all war and its anguished memories.

For this reason too Byelorussian poets, with such power and conviction sing the praise of peace and friendship between the peoples. Their voice is the voice of those who have tasted the full horror of war, and demand that over our globe, the cradle of humanity, the songs of peace and friendship should ring forever. Their voice is that of Byelorussia, who is a member of UNO in her own right, and struggles there for progress and peaceful coexistence between nations.

In the verses of our poets you will feel a wide freedom and a meditative calm.... Here speaks the nature of our land, its tranquil and gently-featured countryside. Here speaks the peaceable and industrious character of our folk.

15 MAKSIM TANK

In the verses of our poets you will hear the rustle of birches, the roar of oaks, firs and pines, and will meet the words "forest", "groves" and "pinewoods". That too is only natural, for practically one third of our Republic is covered with forests. Like great green islands they are scattered about our country. The great ancient forests are called the *pushcha* here. One of the rarest and most beautiful corners of our countryside is the famous Byelovezhskaya Pushcha, with its aurochs. One cannot imagine the history or life of Byelorussia without forests and woodlands, for with them we associate the feeling of homeland. Therefore they have taken their place, as you will see, in our hearts and in our poetry.

In the verse of our poets you may be surprised to hear the splash of waves.... But it cannot be otherwise, for lakes also form an inseparable part of the Byelorussian landscape.

The pearls of our country are our largest lake, named Narochny, and our most hidden and mysterious one—Svityaz, whose praises have more than once been sung by our poets.

Blue lakes. Blue strips of forest. Blue fields of flax. Blue skies. Girls' blue eyes. Eyes blue as the heavens, and heavens as blue as girls' eyes! This is the source of the characteristic epithet of the Byelorussian poet—blue, the depths of blue.

Of course, one cannot imagine the picture of modern Byelorussia without her industrial centres, without her powerful and up-to-the-minute factories, with the last word in technical equipment, without her oil-derricks and her salt-producing combines. While previously our poetry was founded on the peasant way of life, bound up in its origins and its themes with the village, in the last decade it has widened its thematic framework and increasingly pays attention to the city and the factory worker. The new technology, the new instruments of toil are becoming ever more frequently the subject matter of our poetry. But that does not in any way mean that man is left out of our field of vision. Far from it, for as we all know, even the most sophisticated calculating machine is only an assistant to man's mind, even the swiftest flying machines and rockets, going beyond the sound barrier and cosmic velocities, are only the continuation of his steps upon the earth, and the radio stations penetrating the silence of space are his hands stretching out towards the stars.

Man, human life, and happiness—these are the central subjects of attention, and the main source of

inspiration for modern Byelorussian poetry. Therefore, it is interested in everything—from everyday life to historic events. Nothing remains outside its field of vision—the past and the present, the far and the near, the earthly and the cosmic, the personal and the universally human—all comes within its orbit.

I notice, incidentally, that with the development of the scientific and technological revolution, our poetry is being renewed, and is changing its character. Of course, its fundamental principles remain, as previously, its partisanship and popular character.

With its own particular means it strives to reflect the experience of our people, their thoughts and feelings too. But at the same time the poem is taking on a more dynamic character, and in it associative meditation makes itself felt with an ever-increasing power. Poetry is becoming more expressive in style.

Speaking of modern Byelorussian poetry, and of the circumstances and conditions leading to its further development, one cannot help noticing and remarking on such a beneficial factor as its fruitful ties with the literatures of the nations of the USSR—with the Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Moldavian and so on, and with the literatures of the socialist commonwealth, such as the Polish, Bulgarian and others. On the mosaic map of multinational Soviet literature, every stone in it sparkles with its own unique hue, and every stone, even the smallest, is dear to us, for without it the inimitable harmonious landscape of our multinational literature would be shattered. In recent times this collaboration between our literatures has become especially intensive. Our poetry is translated into the national languages of the peoples of the USSR. Byelorussian poets, in their turn, translate the verses of their colleagues in the fraternal republics into the Byelorussian tongue. This is a significant contribution to the strengthening of international ties and contacts. In our view, the coming together of fraternal literatures gives birth not to some kind of super-national literature, but to one freed from outlived elements, and enriched with new ones, with progressive traditions, arising naturally out of our Soviet conditions, and life as it really is here.

In becoming acquainted with our poetry, the reader will scarcely avoid noticing that poets of several generations are co-operatively at work, side by side, shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand. Alongside the verses of the 70-year-old Kanstantsia Builo, whose first book appeared in 1914 under the editorship of Yanka Kupala, and who,

17 MAKSIM TANK

despite her age, is still actively writing today, are seen the first verses of the 25-year-old Yaugenia Yanishchits—a recent graduate of the Byelorussian State University. Here we see before our eyes the living continuation of the generations. In this way the young poets organically imbibe the best traditions of their native poesy, and learn from the example of their elder brothers of the pen.

Meanwhile the veteran poets for their part do everything possible to facilitate the creative debut of the new poets, and to provide them with a ticket for their great journey on the road to literature.

We in Byelorussia say that if every man planted at least one tree in his lifetime, the earth would be an orchard. We poets of the older generation count it our duty to help to set at least one young author upon his feet.

In general terms the range of age in today's poetry cannot fail to make us rejoice, and to entertain high hopes for the future. It speaks of the diversity of our poetry, of its youth and its maturity.

As far as the poems themselves are concerned, those of old master-hands, and the up and coming young brigade, you have, esteemed reader, an excellent opportunity at present of getting to know them. May the acquaintance prove a pleasant one!

*Maksim Tank,
People's Poet
of Byelorussia*

**Fair Land
of Byelorussia**



EDZI AGNYATSVET



EDZI AGNYATSVET was born in Minsk in 1916. Her first poems were published in 1931. Her first collection of verses *My Generation* came out in 1935. They were followed by *Spring Morning*, *Simple Songs*, *To a Friend at the Front*, *On the Volga's Banks* and others. She writes a great deal for children and adolescents. She is a member of the All-Union Association of Workers in Literature and Art for Children.

She translates into Byelorussian the verses by poets from various nationalities of the USSR, and also from the French. The works of Béranger, Appolinaire and Saint-Exupéry have been published in her translations.

The poem "Misha Kaminski" included in the anthology, is devoted to an event of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people against Hitlerite fascism (1941-45). In May 1943, the inhabitants of Khatyn ("hut settlement"), not far from Minsk, were herded into a barn — the aged, the women and children together — and were burned alive, while their huts were all set afire. A similar fate overtook about 150 Byelorussian villages. Now Khatyn has become a place of pilgrimage. A memorial complex has been laid out there, with rows of niches containing the ashes and names of other "Khatyns" which have perished for ever. Altogether the fascists burned down more than 9,000 villages in Byelorussia.

My Wish
"Belarus" Tractor in India
The "Appassionata"
The Law of Attraction
Misha Kaminski

My Wish

I wish to come to you
with new-found verses.
But they are roaming—
wandering round the copses.
With the wood-zephyrs hide-and-seeking,
With the wood-peckers time are keeping.
Try to find them anyhow!
They are in the wild crane's cry,
the bright cloud pocket,
Or perhaps have flown off in a cosmic rocket?
Dew-drenched,
like the morning brightening,
True-edged,
like the stormy lightning—
I desire to find them now!
Though but little twigs they be in the shady grove,
Though but little bricks they be in my native home,
Seething, frothing main,
Healing drops of rain—
I desire to find them now!
Endless churns my heart's unrest,
all night and day there,
And I serve my ardent breast—
toil like a labourer!
At their forest address,
On the banner of happiness—
I desire to find them now!

1967

"Belarus" Tractor in India

Byelorussian young lads made him strong as a bison,
With massive effect, like a giant, he stands.
He attentively looks at the southern horizon,
Not before having seen these exotic lands.

He has no tourist ticket—

Then the tractorist came,

It seemed far away factory hooters saluted,

The old elephant

And black-eyed brown children cried:

1958

The "Appassionata"

"Music must strike fire from the human soul."

Beethoven.

All in vain will you listen for here
The echoing fountains!
This is pain, and humanity's tear,
This is thunder in mountains!

And the fierce gust of wind in the glade,
And the eagle's cry, sharper.
This is joy which from grief has made
A majestic martyr.

Here is no kind of rustic idyll,
Here no pastoral lovers.
Here is love which is courage itself—
Which the lightning uncovers.

From humanity's trembling soul
This free music strikes fire.
In the conflict, to sorrow's toll,
Sings of victory near.

And if burning personal grief
Has mown you down in full flower,
It gives courage to you in the strife
With its musical power.

Do you hear
how the strings reach the stars,
The loud ocean beneath us?
That is man walking proud on earth's path,
There unchained goes Prometheus.

Not for nought Lenin loved this grand theme,
His soul in elation.
He took these full chords as a hymn
To man's liberation.

1963-64

The Law of Attraction

In nature old Newton revealed
The secret of gravitation.
I believe in the wonderful field
Of mutual attraction.

The rivers yearn for the sea,
Our earth for the stars shows affection,
And a hand from afar reaches me,
To my hand,
 like a magnet's
 attraction.

Invisible bridges arise,
And echoes sound warmer and clearer,
And sudden,
 I feel you arrive,
You draw nearer,
 and nearer,
 and nearer!

No need for your telegrams, dear.
In my heart there's unshaken conviction.
I believe:
 of yourself you'll appear,
For that—
 is the law of attraction!

1970

Misha Kaminski

The Little Lad from Khatyn

A hut. And inside, the laughter of bells,
A babe's first steps—and mother's heart swells....
The little fellow was one, her son,
The little fellow was one!

What did he know, that golden-head?
His first two simple words he'd said,
he knew mother's song,
and mother's smile,
and mother's tale.

Misha Kaminski—
Little Khatynsie.

Ashes—in place of a baby's palms....
A chimney.

Above it the wind howls alarms.
That's not the wind—
that is I, my heart
Which from grief is bursting apart.

Above the black chimney—
the sad bell tolls.

Let it ring out,
like the thunder rolls—
With a million voices
let it sound—

Warning savage barbarians round.
Misha Kaminski—
Little Khatynsie!

Our little cornflower-blue-eyed one—
Dear land of Byelorussia's son....
To mothers of all the continents five
Your little hands you stretch from the grave,
These hands,
all blackened and charred in the fire:
"Defend us babies,
your babies there!
From atom bombs,
from the napalm we fear,
Protect us, protect us, mother dear!

I want to run on the meadows green,
I want to live, as my own laws mean,

[illegible]

MIKOLA AROCHKA



MIKOLA AROCHKA was born in 1933, in the village of Vetsyavichi, in the Grodny region. He graduated from the Byelorussian State University, then took a post-graduate course at the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences' Literary Institute. He is Candidate of philological science.

His published books of verse include *Not All Meadows Are Mown*, *Stormbroken Zone*, *Winged Seeds*, *Flowers of an Immortal*.

In recent years he has been actively engaged as a literary critic. He is the author of a series of works about modern Byelorussian poetry.

"Somewhere on the river Nile's green delta..."
Elk Calf
"At candour..."



* * *

Somewhere on the river Nile's green delta
Storks are gathering for their homeward flight.
Maybe there they find no food nor shelter,
Maybe there the living space is tight?

Clearly not.
But in warm lands far distant,
One thing's lacking for their feathered guests—
Those tall oaks, on Nieman's shores existent,
Where they really need to build their nests.

1968

Elk Calf

A crack in the silence, sharp as a shot.
A rumble of hoofs through the saplings ranks.
The mother elk broke aside at a trot,
And shielded her calf behind her flanks.

She lightly leaped across each old stump,
Across the trench with water like pitch.
Well, tottery long-legs, make the jump!
But he couldn't—he couldn't just overcome
His primary fear of the deep dark ditch.

And having returned to her offspring there,
The elk leapt again over waters black.
But he stood and quietly mooed in her track,
And almost cried in the depths of despair.

With safety, with rose-willow smelled that side,
And behind him rough steps were rustling near....
Then she, with her forehead firm and wide
Gently prodded her progeny—under his rear!

Head over heels, topsy-turvy went he.
 'Mid the yellowish reeds she lay on the ground.
 But still, from her knees, was able to see
 How in milky-white mist
 Her young calf skipped around!

1970

* * *

At candour,
 ever happy to tell all;
 at seekers for the fern-flower,
 truth as well;
 at dreams
 which live in hope and indecision—
 I'll never cast
 the brick-bat of derision,
 Because, so doing,
 I shall strike myself.

1970

ANATOL ASTREIKA



ANATOL ASTREIKA was born in 1911, in the village of Pesochnoye, in the Minsk province. His first verses were published in 1928. In 1940 his book of verse *Glory to Life* came out. During the Great Patriotic War (1941-45) he worked in the editorial offices of a satirical newspaper and poster publication *Crush the Fascist Swine!* On orders from the Staff of the partisan movement, he was twice sent into the enemy rear. In 1943 his collection entitled *Slutsky Zone*, which enjoyed great popularity among the partisans, was issued by the underground press of the newspaper *People's Avenger*. The theme of war remains one of the chief in the present work of the poet.

In the post-war years the following books of his verse appeared: *Kremlin Stars*, *Good-day*, *My Land*, *The Adventures of Grandad Mikheda*, *With an Open Heart*, and others.

Blessing
My Tent
Autumn Goes

Blessing

Yes, be it blessed a hundred times—
The happy hour of wished arrival,
When a brave lad from Soviet lines
Comes to the land of my own people.
And blessed be his bold advance—
Immortal songs shall sing his praises—
All, glad, will take him in their arms,
In old Polotsk and green Polesye.
And blessed be the fray's first sound,
The distant roar of steel chase rising.
The prisoner suddenly hears: though bound,
He glances east with screwed-up eyes then....
And blessed be the partisan
Who's first to blast with mine and cartridge
The battered enemy on the run,
And vengeance takes, to our advantage.
Praised be the people's guide and friend:
Through sleepless nights, with keen-eyed vision,
To our dear land of tears unstemmed
He sends the liberating mission.
The foe burned crops and homes by the score.
Shall we take insults unrewarded?
Thrice blessed be those who fell in war,
Who native soil from foes have guarded.

1943

My Tent

In the forest under birches,
Hid from foes' inquisitive eye,
In no hut, and in no trenches,
But in greenery tent I lie.

In the earth seven stout poles driven—
Round them twigs and reeds I wove.

Like a burial-mound, moss-hidden,
Stands my partisan abode.

Palm-sized table in the middle—
Five more poles as bed I keep,
Spread with fragrant hay a little,
So as softer there to sleep.

Everything in proper order:
Where I lie—I make my bed.
If there's rain, my tent 'gainst water
I soon pitch above my head.

Time will leave no war-time traces:
Then on eager footsteps bent
Deep in the woods I'll seek old places—
Find my partisan green tent.

1943

Autumn Goes

Autumn goes: a skewbald mare she rides.
Sun takes just a glance, and seeks the cloud.
Flocks of cranes go sailing 'cross the skies,
With resounding cries, prolonged and loud.

Swallows yesterday soared in the height.
Not a single swallow flies today.
How it was they left this land in flight,
When it was—there's not a soul can say.

People say that nobody has seen
When the migrant swallows leave their homes,
And that on the dark bed of the stream
These swift birds fall suddenly, like stones.

"Sowers"—that's what starlings here are called;
If they're gathered ready in their host

And, like bees, swarm out above the field—
Then the days for sowing must not be lost.

From the shed the harrow then we bring,
Gather up the drill-ploughs' whole brigade,
And in autumn, for the coming spring,
How much grain we need to sow indeed!

When the geese go streaming to the south,
Through the pallid skies in arrowing skein,
Then we harness horses to the ploughs—
Surely, we must get potatoes in.

Autumn goes. A skewbald mare she rides.
Rainclouds pass, and sun shines warm again.
We collective peasants field-ward stride,
And each day work harder, might and main.

1945



MIKOLA AURAMCHIK



MIKOLA AURAMCHIK was born in 1920, in the village of Plessy, in the Mogilyov province. His first verses appeared on the pages of the local newspapers in 1937. During the Great Patriotic War against fascist Germany, he took part in battles on the Volkhovsky and North-Western fronts. He was taken prisoner in encirclement, and transported to the Ruhr, where he was given penal servitude in the coal mines.

After the war he studied in the Byelorussian State University, named after Lenin, from which he graduated in 1949. In that same year his first collection of verse *Forward Frontier* appeared. In the following years several other books of his verse were published.

He has been awarded the Republic's Yanka Kupala Literary Prize.

"The thrown wide open windows..."

Pigeons

Byelorussian Pine

Meeting of Old Ponymen

"Here they are, the wide and free expanses..."

MIKOLA AURAMCHIK

THE THROWN WIDE OPEN WINDOWS...

The thrown wide open windows show and conceal
The thrown wide open windows show and conceal
The thrown wide open windows show and conceal
The thrown wide open windows show and conceal

I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows

Wherever we are, wherever we are, wherever we are
Wherever we are, wherever we are, wherever we are
Wherever we are, wherever we are, wherever we are
Wherever we are, wherever we are, wherever we are

I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows

The thrown wide open windows show and conceal
The thrown wide open windows show and conceal
The thrown wide open windows show and conceal
The thrown wide open windows show and conceal

I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows

The thrown wide open windows show and conceal
The thrown wide open windows show and conceal
The thrown wide open windows show and conceal
The thrown wide open windows show and conceal

I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows
I look up to the thrown wide open windows

* * *

TO M.P.A.

The thrown wide open windows, doors and courtyards,
The blown wide open huts and gates a-yawn
From out the smoke and gloom appeared before us
When we took back the village in the dawn.

A dead girl in the frozen snow was lying,
Her grey disordered plaits fell in a knot.
I did not see—was it the hoar-frost's whitening,
Or were they grey from grief's tormenting lot.

Somewhere as well, perhaps, your broken body
Lies cast aside like that upon the snow,
Your pallid face with tear-stains smeared and ruddy,
And petrified by bitter frost just so.

I longed to find the very shortest pathway
To come to you as quickly as I might....
Some under fire, weak-kneed, went crawling hardly,
While others by my side ran at full height.

The foe held one last hut, fired from the attic.
I did not notice, shooting on the run,
How in the fierce attack my automatic
Expended all the bullets in its drum.

It seemed to me that hut which we were raiding
Was one I knew so well, so long ago....
And if my heart had been a hand-grenade, then
I would have hurled it through the window too!

1942

Pigeons

In the village, mid the fruit and flowers,
Where we passed our years of green and gold,

We would listen quietly for hours
To the ancient yarns, our grandads told.

There we heard the carefree cooing pigeons,
There we saw their young ones' timid flight....
There we knew at dove-grey dawn's beginning
No alarms, no cares, no sorry plight.

There the mists above the huts went curling,
And our distant childhood's skein of days,
Like young dappled pigeons went a-whirling
In a fluttering cloud of mottled greys.

Now those stories we've forgot in worry,
To recall them now would be quite vain....
Helmets on our heads, to war we hurry,
Called away on some unknown campaign.

With the bitter wormwood by the trackway,
And the prickly grasses under heel....
In your throat the gall, your feet in agony,
That is not a story—that is real.

If you chance to doze off for a moment,
Then into your dreams the pigeons whirl....
Maybe somewhere she, in similar torment,
Thinks about you too, your cherished girl.

See, the pigeon knows my thoughts are itching,
Moans there on the path, and doesn't coo—
It's so bitter that the carrier pigeon
Brings me not a word of news from you.

I would die in battle without flinching,
If I knew that children, year by year,
Still would hear the carefree cooing pigeons,
And grow up not knowing grief nor war.

1942

Byelorussian Pine

In every drift it smells of Byelorussia,
With ancient forest's resin-weeping pine....
Beneath the earth each gallery, heading, fissure,
Appears to be a forest in the mine.

Above the low sharp coal-face there the ceiling
Is firmly held by pit-props, line on line,
And overhead, sometimes, you have the feeling
They start to creak like boughs upon the pine.

Upon them presses that preponderous cover,
The seams you've undercut and pinned below,
The strata of millennia hang over,
Five hundred solid metres thick, or so.

'Neath such a weight the pit-prop does not shudder,
Upon its shoulders resin pearls like sweat,
But still the pine-log stands both straight and stubborn,
And strives to break through to the sunshine yet.

With stern persistence coal you go on hacking,
The sparks go flying from your picks at play....
Your native pine beneath such pressure standing
Will never her brave countrymen betray.

1947

Meeting of Old Ponymen

To Pavel Besposhchadny

You were, it's clear, a ponyman by vocation,
But I, my friend, was a conscript ponyman.
I close my eyes—in tense imagination
I see it, like some awful dream, again.

That pit in smoky Ruhr I still remember,
And there not I, another, bowed in grime,
A skinny skeleton scarecrow I resembled,
And on the wall a shadow bent, not mine.

You worked in your own homeland with your fellows,
And Plover was the name you gave your steed,
With sharp-pricked ears, and mane like flying billows,
Who with his hammering hooves struck sparks indeed.

Don't tell me any more of him this evening,
How down the mine he knew your word so well,—
My heart, just like a wounded bird's, is beating
And burning with my memories, as you tell.

I had a nag whose foreign tag was Teufel,
But I called him Poor Devil more than once,
Although I did not know his name meant Devil,
And called him Poor old Devil just by chance.

In that Ruhr pit he was the only person
To whom I might have said a word, you know—
But all the same, when I spoke Byelorussian,
He didn't understand "Gee-up" nor "Whoa!"

With trustful eyes, intelligent and tearful,
He looked at me with such a longing glance,
As though he understood, and found it awful
That to exchange a word we had no chance.

Those living eyes of his grew cold and glassy,
From constant dark and tears he grew half-blind,
And they reminded me, how in that darkness
There waited me a fate of similar kind....

The mist is rising. Here the warmth of twilight
Dies in the avenue, in the chill of night.
It seems an ocean somewhere has grown quiet,
Beyond the dewy poplars' green-walled height.

And further—steppe, the pitheads and the slagheaps—
One takes the other's arm beneath his own,
They stroll, those former drivers of pit-naggies,
Along the street of this Donbas small town.

1957

* * *

Here they are, the wide and free expanses,
Immemorial fields, my native land....
On both sides the billowing rye-sea dances,
Almost floods the road on either hand.

And above them, like an obelisk rising,
Rears a giant oak with proud-poised head,
Thrice-struck by the lightning, still surviving,
Like some watch-tower, guarding branches spread.

When the cock greets dawn, and flaps his pinions,
With the diligent sun, from east to west,
To survey his limitless dominions
Then the stork soars skywards from its nest.

Here a maid her early pathway follows,
Stings her legs on grass bejewelled with dew....
Ice-cold water the old well-bucket swallows,
While the handle hoarsely creaks anew.

If you'd seen how here the lilac blossoms
Round the hut, like tongues of fire, rise
And how this reflected image of them
Fills the windows, and the girl's bright eyes;

How before the coming of the summer,
Orchards warmed by sunshine seethe with flowers,
And the pink-white foam, a pallied wonder,
Splashes on these languishing dales of ours;